TOWER OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, TAUNTON.

[15TH CENTURY.]



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Two or three weeks ago, called in to examine professionally the very interesting church at Wrington, in Somersetshire (and concerning which we shall have a few words to say hereafter, not unimportant to church-builders), we took to the "down" rail again, instead of the "up," and steamed on to Taunton, to revive our recollection of the church of St. Mary Magdalene. Five-and-thirty miles on the iron horse take less time than a short spire-hunt on foot "across country."

It is too late now to talk to our readers of the very extensive works at St. Mary's, which, commenced in 1842, through the exertions of the vicar, Dr. Cottle, and carried on during several years with a large expenditure, have completely restored the body of the church, elaborately (though perhaps, in some cases, questionably) decorated it, and made it an object of attraction to visiters from all parts of the country,—works which we are sorry to hear, by the way, have so crippled the resources of the vicar, as to force him to quit the scene of his labours and seek some more lucrative appointment.

We were, however, so struck by the miserable condition of the tower of the church that we cannot avoid calling attention to it, to aid in leading to its restoration.

Annexed we give a view of this structure, to enable such of our readers as have not seen it to appreciate its beauties. It is one of the best towers of the Perpendicular period,—standing pre-eminent in a county distinguished by the elegance of its towers. There is no record of the date of its erection, but it may be safely ascribed to the latter half of the fifteenth century.

In an essay on the "Gothic Towers of Somerset," forming part of an elegant and interesting book descriptive of St. Mary's, Taunton, published by Mr. May, of that place, it is said on this point,—"There are, unfortunately, no coats of arms, or cognizances, upon the tower, to settle the exact date when it was built; but on the transoms of the two upper series of belfrey windows are sculptured angels supporting shields, on which are carved the initials R. B. These letters may refer to Richard Beere, Abbot of Glastonbury, who presided over that establishment in the fifteenth century,—a dignitary eminently skilled in architecture, and who built the church at Glastonbury, on which are sculptured the same initials, R. B.; it is therefore not unlikely that he may have designed the beautiful tower of St. Mary's Church."* Beere was installed abbot January 20th, 1493, and died January, 1524.

The engraving gives a south-east view of the tower, and shows also the body of the church as restored. The stone-work of the former is in a dreadful state of decay and disruption. On each of the four stories the walls are tied together with iron bars, which go right through to the outside; and the crowning perforated pinnacles and traceried parapets are scarcely safe.

It is to be hoped that measures will speedily be taken to restore this very interesting specimen of fifteenth century art.

SOMERSETSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.—This society held their general meeting on Wednesday, in last week, when Sir Walter Trevelyan presided, and the Hon. Mr. Bouverie, Mr. Daubeny, Dr. Buckland, Mr. Britton, the Rev. Mr. Dymock (the hon. secretary), Mr. Giles, Mr. Crosse, and others, took part. Dr. Buckland characterized the use of Bath-stone in London as a gross mistake, and said none should come into Westminster Abbey so long as he was there.

* "Some Account of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton; with several Notices on Ecclesiastical Matters. Beautifully printed in Imperial 8vo., with 16 Engravings and Ground Plan." Containing, also, besides the essay already mentioned, a paper on "The Ecclesiastical Architecture of England;" and another on the "Ornaments of Churches." Sold by Hamilton, Adams, and Co. London: and F. May, Taunton.

TASK-WORK.

KNOWING your willingness to give publicity to any existing grievances or abuses of trade, I beg, through the aid of your journal, to call the attention of the building public generally to the system much in practice among builders, denominated *task-work*,—not that I wish to impute blame to builders, but to offer a caution against a system that is alike injurious to themselves and to the interests of the working-classes.

A builder, being anxious to let a portion of work, allows certain parties to send in tenders for the same—labour only, and in many cases his foreman is included. This person wishing to keep his situation, and the other parties also wishing to obtain employment, send in, as is generally the case, ridiculously low prices: the consequence is, that the accepted party, whom we shall call the task-master, after making an agreement to draw wages every week, is well aware, at least this is generally the case from the low price given, that there will be no balance when the work is completed, even if it can be done for the money, excepting by management. He, therefore, employs a quantity of inferior workmen, or what are termed "improvers," at trifling wages, and they are mixed with superior workmen. He is then able to draw the full wages for all parties, enriching himself at the expense of the builder, and to the injury of the mechanic. Should he find the sum agreed not likely to bear out, he, having nothing to lose, can leave the job whenever he thinks proper, leaving the builder and men in the lurch.

But I am convinced, throughout all the building line, there is no branch so abused as the one to which I belong, viz., plastering, owing to the ready access the task-master has to hawk-boys. Those boys, after serving a plasterer a few months, are put to casting ornament, lathing, colouring, and other minor things. In a short time one of these is placed with a mechanic (this branch generally

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